

THE STORY OF A MODEL.

BY ELIZABETH PHIPPS TRAIN.



YOU ask if I get interested in my models? Well, yes, occasionally; I have had some rather unusual specimens." And the speaker flicked the ash off his cigar, while a little look of retrospection crept into his handsome gray eyes.

The scene was the smoking-room of a well-known club; and Vinton Graham, an artist of good repute, whose name was as familiar in European as American salons, was replying to the questions of a man with whom he had been chatting since the now half-consumed cigar had been undergoing the accomplishment of its destiny.

His expression, perhaps more than his words, awoke his companion's curiosity.

"You have some special affair in your mind?" he observed, with a suggestive inflection that hinted the desire he scarcely liked to word.

"H'm! Well, yes," returned Graham. "In the mood for a somewhat lengthy yarn? Light a fresh weed, then. Try one of mine—good ones, honestly. Well, let me see—" He paused a moment, to marshal his reminiscences into proper order, and then commenced his narration:

It is just about twenty years ago that I was one day sitting at work in my studio, sketching in the outlines of a picture I had had some time in contemplation. The subject was Tennyson's Elaine, and the scene that in which the dead, steered by the dumb, floats upward with the flood to Camelot. I had progressed pretty fairly with the preliminary work; had a most excellent model for the dumb servitor, but was all up a tree for a satisfactory Elaine.

Among my regular models, none seemed to fit my ideal, and I had been obliged, *faute de mieux*, to fall back upon a girl who did not suit me at all, but whom I had begun to sketch in because I could do no better. I was working away in rather a discouraged despondent frame of mind, when there came a rap at the door. "Come in," I called out;

and, as the door swung slowly back upon its hinges, as if pushed by a timid hand, I felt that the god of art had been moved to pity my dilemma and had sent me the realization of my dreams.

A woman, or rather girl, stood upon the threshold; and a sunbeam, slanting across the floor, chanced to fall full upon her and threw into startling radiance the exquisite purity of her delicately-molded face and the glory of her golden hair. I had supposed the knock heralded the arrival of some fellow-artist or model, and had not taken the trouble to rise in response to it; observing, however, how great had been my mistake, I sprang to my feet and went forward.

"Pardon my unceremoniousness," I said. "I had not expected to be so honored. Pray be seated."

The beautiful face, which had been so pale, flushed hotly as I spoke, and I could see that the stranger was quite overcome with confusion. She took no heed of my invitation, but clasped her hands nervously together and said in a low tremulous voice:

"You are Mr. Graham, the artist?"

I bowed.

"I have come," she began, with downcast eyes, then paused, pressed her white teeth hard into her under lip, drew a long deep breath, advanced a step or two into the room, and then, as if some thought had given her sudden courage, raised her eyes, and, as she gazed full at me, said: "Sir, do you want a model?"

If she had asked "Sir, do you want a laundress?" I could not have been more astonished. Ever since my eyes had first rested upon her, my one thought had been how to induce her to sit for me. I had never doubted but that she had come to order the execution of some commission; never suspected that she, whose whole appearance breathed the utmost refinement and breeding, could have come to offer her beauty for sale.

Undoubtedly I showed my surprise and thereby added to her distress, for I observed that an ominous quiver was troubling her

lips and that there was a suspicious moisture gathering in her eyes. I hastened to reassure her, and felt that a matter-of-fact business-like tone might be the easiest method of effecting my purpose.

"A model?" I said. "Indeed I do! And, if you will step this way, I can show you in a moment how much I need your services, and how grateful I should feel if I could secure them."

She followed me to the easel, and I showed her the sketch, pointing out the shadowy Elaine and explaining to her wherein the present model disappointed me. I rambled on for some moments to allow her to collect herself, and, when I finally paused, I saw that I had succeeded in setting her comparatively at her ease.

"You are really willing to engage me, then?" she asked. "And may I come at once—to-morrow?"

"The sooner the better," I replied. "And I thank you more than I can express, for the great favor you are conferring upon me. Before you go, you will take a glass of wine to ratify our engagement? For I assure you I cannot quite believe in my good-fortune, and fear even now that you may escape me unless you hallow the bond by breaking bread with me."

While I spoke, I opened my buffet and set out wine and biscuit. These I offered her as a mere form of politeness, but I was startled and shocked to see the avidity with which she devoured the slight refreshment. She had not seemed eager to respond to my hospitality; but, with the first mouthful, her formality and reserve appeared to vanish, and she dispatched the dozen or more wafers with the eagerness of a starving person. When the last crumb had disappeared, she seemed to realize what she had done. A hot wave crimsoned her face; she covered her eyes with her hands and burst into a fit of bitter weeping.

I drew a chair up to her and begged her to sit down and calm herself; but she did not seem to hear me and continued to stand, while her slight frame shook and shook with the violence of her sobs. Finally the storm spent itself, as storms will; and presently, as I was pretending to occupy myself with some work in the back of the studio, so as to leave her free to collect herself, I heard my name called and went forward to where she stood.

"You have been very kind to me, sir," she said, brokenly; "so kind that I feel I owe you an explanation of what must have seemed a singular exhibition of greediness on my part. I had not realized I was so hungry until I tasted your biscuit. You will perhaps pardon my fierce attack on your supplies when I tell you that for two days I have lived upon weak tea, which, as you may imagine, is scant nourishment for a naturally excellent appetite."

She smiled, but I could not see the joke. My God! To think of such privation was horrible—to realize it, impossible.

"Great heavens!" I cried. "You must be famished. Wait just one minute, and I'll get—"

"Nothing else," she interrupted. "I have had an excellent meal—more than you think, perhaps, for I have had my craving for employment also satisfied. I regret, sir, that I have so troubled you, and am more mortified than I can express; but—but your unexpected kindness and consideration are to blame for my conduct. Good-morning!"

"Stay!" I exclaimed. "You cannot go yet. It is my custom invariably to pay my models in advance. Yes, it is," I protested, as I saw an incredulous smile dawn upon her face. "I have found it the best way, as it is a hold upon them. Before I began this system, I was subjected to many disappointments in the matter of broken appointments; now I rarely suffer such annoyance. Each day, I pay for the next sitting."

She suffered me to press the silver upon her, although I fear my ruse scarcely imposed upon her credulity; and, as the door swung to behind her, I went back and seated myself before Elaine, not to increase but to diminish its growth. And, as I carefully rubbed out the semblance of my former model, my whole mind was occupied with speculations upon the history of the woman whose beauty was bound to make the work a masterpiece.

My lovely model fulfilled her promise and gave me a sitting the next day, and then on alternate days for a week. This was her own suggestion, as she explained that she had the sole care of an invalid and that such an arrangement would be more convenient to her. On the days when she was absent, I worked on the other figure, the model for which was an old fellow who had posed for me for years.

By Jove! I cannot understand how I escaped falling in love with that girl! Her beauty, winning manners, and apparent loveliness of character would have fascinated most men, I think; but there was something about her which, while it permitted me to admire and to like her immensely, forbade my making a fool of myself—as I should have done, had I fallen in love with her.

I have a strong prejudice against showing any of my work until it is completed, and so it happened that my fair model never looked upon her counterfeit presentment; for, as bad luck would have it, after she had given me four sittings and I had almost finished her figure, she suddenly and without warning vanished from my sight, and all my endeavors to trace or discover her proved vain. I was utterly chagrined, for I had grown to feel a warm interest in her and had flattered myself she returned my genuine attachment.

My picture was too well along to suffer by her defection, and, after I had fairly completed it, I was too fond of it to sell it. Therefore I gave it a place in my parlor, where it served me as a study of the deceptiveness of human appearances; for a circumstance connected with my model's disappearance obliged me, much against my will, to suspect that her lovely face was but the fair mask of a dishonorable and ungrateful soul. It seemed impossible to associate such qualities with her apparent nobility of character; but let me tell you the circumstances, and see if you too would not have made out a case against her.

My studio in those days represented a collection of exceedingly valuable trinkets. I have always had money enough to gratify my hobbies, and I had picked up many really costly curiosities. My new model had, one day, after the sitting was over, admired my collection and had asked—as I then thought, carelessly—what I considered my most valuable possession. I took from a small cabinet, which I kept locked, a very singular bracelet.

It was a narrow iron bangle, perhaps a quarter of an inch wide, set with what appeared to be bits of dull glass, but which in reality were diamonds in the rough, set so as to form three words, "Amor, Amor, Amor," the Latin for love. My model took the curious and unprepossessing article between her slender fingers, and examined it with little apparent admiration.

"It is certainly a singular-looking affair," she remarked; "but pardon me if I confess that I fail to recognize wherein its value lies."

"Chiefly in its history, to a collector," I replied, "although the stones themselves are of no small worth. The romance attached to it is as follows: Many years ago, a young Brazilian of noble birth fell violently in love with the wife of a man of the middle classes. The merchant discovered the young fellow's infatuation for his lovely wife, and taxed him with it in such violent terms as to arouse all the hot blood in the young noble's nature. In a fit of ungovernable rage and passion, he drew forth the small dagger which he wore at his side, and, with a quick sudden thrust, sent it with direct and deadly aim through his accuser's heart. He was arrested for the crime, stripped of his rank, and sent to the diamond-mines for life, to labor as a common convict. The memory of his love remained with him and became in some sort a monomania. After long weary years, he succeeded in carrying out his one desire—to send to the fair cause of his downfall a souvenir which should remind her of their once happy associations.

"With this aim ever in view, he, with infinite cunning and diligence, accumulated and secreted a sufficient number of precious stones to form the inscription which characterizes the bracelet. Having set them into an iron band, he awaited patiently an opportunity of forwarding it to its destination. This was soon forthcoming. It seems it is the custom in Brazil to reward the slave who is fortunate enough to find a seventeen-carat diamond with his liberty. One of these lucky devils was a man with whom the unhappy lover had contracted a warm friendship. He willingly assumed charge of the bracelet and promised to send it to the lady.

"He had but little difficulty in discovering the address of the woman, who had become a fairly notorious character. She received the gift with no emotion and small gratitude, little realizing its value; and, at her death, it was sold at public sale with her other effects, many of which were highly entertaining in character. I happened to be in South America at the time the sale took place, and, hearing that it would include some articles which would repay my attendance in the character of collector, I presented myself

upon the day named, and secured several objects, among which was the bracelet, which I bought for a mere song. Its real history was unknown to the woman's heirs, else I had not gotten it so cheap. It was afterward related to me by her maid, whom I took the trouble to hunt up. Ugly as the bracelet is," I concluded, "I suppose it is worth at least a couple of thousand dollars."

My lovely model expressed much interest in my romance of the bracelet, and shortly after arose to depart. I was going out myself, and offered to escort her a little way, first excusing myself a moment to speak to the old fellow who posed for the dumb servitor, and who had been for some time awaiting me in an inner room. He had probably grown tired of waiting, however, for he had disappeared; so I at once returned to the lady, and we set out.

When I came back, after a very brief absence, I noticed that I had forgotten to lock my little cabinet. As I was about to remedy my omission, I observed that the bracelet was not in its usual place. The most careful search failed to discover it, and I finally concluded that the lady must have forgotten to take it off her arm, whereon she had slipped it to get its full effect. Quite comforted in the thought of regaining possession of it in a couple of days at farthest, I ceased to fret about it, and soon almost forgot about the matter in the interest of my painting, which was fast reaching completion. But, when the fact dawned upon me that my beautiful model had departed, never to return, I think I felt as most men would have done, that the value of the bracelet had tempted her to make herself scarce.

His listener nodded.

"Yes," the latter replied; "but how about your dumb servitor? Might not he have abstracted it?"

"That seemed scarcely probable, for he appeared as usual at his sittings and seemed as poor and unprosperous as ever. Whereas, had he stolen an article worth fully two thousand dollars, he would hardly have needed to pursue such a poor trade as his. I confess I thought of him, but circumstantial evidence was all in his favor. He had left the rooms before me, by his own confession and the evidence of my senses; he had been frequently exposed to temptation, for I am naturally careless and had often left him

alone with money and valuables lying about and had never missed a thing; and, besides, there was the fact of his evidently unchanged condition."

"Strange indeed; and yet I hardly like to think any woman could have been so base."

After a pause, the narrator resumed:

The sequel is quite the strangest part of the story. About five years later, I pulled up stakes and left America for Europe, determined to exhibit, if I had good luck, in the Paris Salon, and breathe for awhile the inspiring art atmosphere of the older world. I had been abroad a couple of years and had been very fairly rewarded for going, when, one spring, I bethought me of my Elaine and that I would send for it and offer it for exhibition at the coming Salon. It came, was seen, and conquered the critics, and I was delighted to find that it had secured an excellent place "on the line." I had a real fondness for the picture and was glad to find it appreciated.

On the opening day of the exhibit, I gave a dinner to some fellows and took them afterward to hear Patti at the Grand Opera. During one of the acts, as I was glancing casually about the theatre, my eyes happened to fall upon a hand and arm that were resting carelessly upon the edge of a neighboring box. Both were exquisitely modeled and cased in soft pearl-colored *Buède*, but, while these members would at any time have attracted me by their symmetry, they possessed upon this occasion an extraneous fascination which held me spell-bound.

Half slipped down upon the hand was an ornament—if such it might be called—which was as familiar to me as my own face. Nothing less, in truth, than my iron bracelet. I felt that I must see the woman who wore it, and, with a hasty excuse to my guests, passed out of the box and gained the opposite side of the auditorium, whence, with my strong opera-glasses leveled at her, I discovered the woman, whom, despite the change of dress and surroundings, I at once recognized as my beautiful model. Immediately I determined upon a bold stroke. Drawing out my note-book, I tore out a leaf and wrote upon it: "Vinton Graham, artist, begs to renew his acquaintance with the Lily Maid of Astolat."

Slipping a franc into the hand of the old woman who has charge of the boxes, I desired

her to deliver the note to the lady in such a box. She almost immediately returned with a message to the effect that madame would be happy to see me.

My feelings were somewhat complicated as I made my way to the box. Notwithstanding the proof positive that I had of her theft, I yet felt a strong renewal of my interest in my erstwhile model, and a real pleasure at the thought of meeting her again. As I entered the box, she arose and came forward with a bright smile of pleasure on her face, extending, with a cordial gesture of welcome, the hand about whose wrist still clung the bracelet.

She had changed much, improved wonderfully, having developed from the slight exquisite slenderness of girlhood into the fuller maturity of womanhood. After a few earnest words of pleasure at renewing my acquaintance, she turned to a gentleman who was the only other occupant of the box, and presented me.

"Herbert," she said, "this is Mr. Graham, the gentleman of whom I have so often spoken and the benefactor who saved us when we were in such bitter need. Mr. Graham—my husband, Sir Herbert Leeds!"

Her face kindled with feeling as she spoke, and the clasp with which the baronet took my hand assured me that he was a hearty good fellow.

"And you knew me at once?" Lady Leeds queried. "I am somewhat surprised, as I have altered a good deal."

I colored hotly and my eyes involuntarily fell upon her arm. She noticed the movement and at once referred to it, simply and without embarrassment.

"Ah!" she said, smiling. "My bracelet first attracted you, connoisseur that you are. Is it not remarkable that the counterpart of your prize should have fallen into my hands? But I have the advantage of you, for mine was given me by the maker himself."

What was this? I was growing more and more bewildered. Was she going to brazen out her theft? The curtain had risen on the last act, and we both felt further conversation would be an outrage on our neighbors.

"Are you alone here?" she whispered; and, as I shook my head, "Go and excuse yourself to your friends, if you can," she said, "and come home with us to supper, if you will; I want to tell you all about it."

A little later, we were enconced in the private parlor of a quiet hotel, where Sir Herbert and Lady Leeds were stopping. A dainty supper had been served, and we were doing ample justice to it—at least, Sir Herbert and his wife were; I was too anxious to hear about the bracelet, to eat.

"I must first relate to you the causes which led to the desperate circumstances in which we were situated when you came to our relief, Mr. Graham. Herbert and I," looking affectionately at her husband, "made a runaway match, which, however, even in our most terrible need, we have never regretted; have we, dear? Like all strays and waifs, we sought refuge in America, both of us believing, in our ignorance, that plenty was easily obtainable there, for those who were willing to work. Alas! the fallacy of such a thought! We did manage to exist for two years, after a fashion, and then came a terrible period, when my husband was stricken with typhoid fever and brought to the very gates of death. It was a dreadful season, that; but, with God's help, we managed to struggle through, although Herbert's convalescence saw us actually penniless. Then, unknown to my husband, I applied to you, and your generous bounty enabled us to live. Mr. Graham, I have often wondered what you could have thought of my sudden disappearance!"

I think I must have looked conscious—I am sure I felt so, but she did not notice it.

"Of course you were annoyed, but it was really not my fault. That last day, after you left me, as I was hurrying on, I suddenly slipped upon a bit of orange-peel and sprained my ankle so that I was obliged to be carried home. I was laid up for three weeks, and dared not send you word for fear of exciting Herbert's anger, for I was afraid to tell him by what means I had been supporting our little ménage. We have gotten over that foolish pride now, dear, haven't we? I had just begun to move about on crutches, when Herbert received news of his father's death and his own accession to the title and estates. We at once set out for England, where we remained until a year ago, when we both felt a desire to return to America for a little visit.

"We made a long stay in your city, Mr. Graham, and, as my own experience had opened my heart to the sufferings of others, I spent much time in studying up your admirable charitable institutions, and even

obtained permission to visit certain of the poorest wards in your hospitals, in order to try to comfort and relieve somewhat the victims of sorrow and disease.

"One patient especially aroused my warmest interest. He was an old foreigner, a man whose face was seamed and furrowed by years of desperate agony of mind. Patient and long-suffering he was, and after a manner attractive, with the attractiveness born of strange and varied experiences. I grew very fond of him, possibly because he seemed to live upon my presence. I think I never have inspired more genuine love than his—it was almost adoration. One day, I went to him sadly, for we had decided to leave America and return to England, and I dreaded to break the news to him. When I finally summoned up sufficient courage to tell him, he took the tidings differently from what I expected. He simply lay very still and clasped his hands hard together, while a tear stole from under his eyelid and rolled down his wrinkled cheek.

"'It is expected,' he said. Then he thrust his hand beneath his pillow and drew forth a box. Opening it, he took out this bangle and held it out to me. 'Take it, Amiguita'—his name for me—'I made it for one who looked like you; it is yours.'

"As I took it into my hands, I uttered an exclamation. 'Fernando,' I said, 'how came you by this? It belongs to Mr. Graham, the artist.'

"He grew violently excited at this. 'It is a lie,' he said; 'it belongs to no one but me. I made it myself with my own hands. Dios! It is mine, mine, I tell you; I swear it by the Holy Mother and her Child. Every diamond I know by heart, I who dug it from the earth itself. Your Mr. Graham may have another, but this is mine, and now yours, my lady, if you will have it.'

"There, Mr. Graham, that is the history of my bracelet. Is it not almost the counterpart of yours? Have you it here in Paris? I should so like to compare them."

I told her of my loss, and she was greatly astonished. What I neglected to tell her

was that the date of its theft corresponded with that of her disappearance. I was convinced of the absurdity of my former suspicions, and would not permit her to imagine them possible.

I took my departure, more bewildered than ever about the bracelet, whose theft threatened to remain an unexplained mystery to the end of time. I had invited Sir Herbert and Lady Leeds to lunch with me the next day, and to accompany me to the Salon for the purpose of viewing "Elaine."

There was quite a little crowd gathered about the picture, as I led the fair original up to it, the next afternoon. Her eyes naturally fell first upon the central figure, and a little flush of gratified vanity glowed in her face as she observed the exceeding grace and loveliness of the maiden. Then she lifted her eyes to the dumb servitor, and I felt her hand grasp my arm, while a low exclamation broke from her lips.

"What is it?" I asked, more than half prepared for her reply.

"Why, Mr. Graham, it is he—my poor old Fernando!"

So you see, my dear fellow, that circumstantial evidence may play strange pranks. There can be little doubt that old Fernando, its original possessor, reappropriated the bracelet—having heard me relate its history to Lady Leeds from some place of concealment in my rooms. I should like to have heard the old fellow's story from his own lips.

What a queer world it is, after all! To think that I should have unsuspectingly employed for years an escaped convict, the hero of a romance stranger than fiction!

"By Jove! it was queer," assented the other man. "And the bracelet—do you still own it? I should like to see it."

"No; I insisted upon Lady Leeds's retaining it, as I felt her claim to be far stronger than mine. I had purchased it for a mere song, while he who had given it to her had paid for it by years of suffering, toil, and hardship. Come—I'm afraid I've bored you to death."

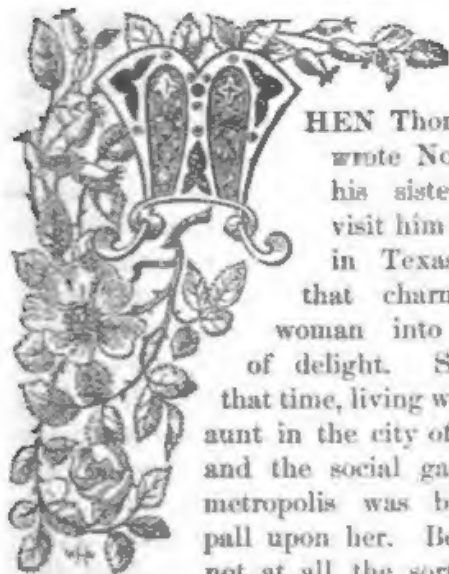
FORGETFULNESS.

How each day brings the petty dust
Our soon choked souls to fill,

And we forget because we must
And not because we will.

A ROMANCE OF THE BIG HORN.

BY HOWARD SEELY, AUTHOR OF "A NYMPH OF THE WEST," "A RANCHMAN'S STORIES," "A DAPHNE OF THE FOOT-HILLS," ETC.



I.

HEN Thomas Brevoort wrote North, begging his sister Grace to visit him on his ranch in Texas, he threw that charming young woman into an ecstasy of delight. She was, at that time, living with a maiden aunt in the city of New York, and the social gayety of the metropolis was beginning to pall upon her. Besides, it was not at all the sort of life to which she had been accustomed. Her girlhood had been passed at their country-seat—a beautiful estate on the shores of the Hudson—and she had grown up with a love of horses, dogs, and all the environments of a rural home. Bereavements had come early, and with a mutual regret the brother and sister had gone to the city to live. But the change was too sudden to be agreeable; Thomas Brevoort found business irksome, and it was not long before he caught the ranching fever and departed for a wider field. It was a great cross to his sister when he came to go away. But she had followed his trials and successes with all the interest of a sister's loving heart, and meanwhile had accepted the only life that seemed to be left to her. And it was not so very long before Tom, having the advantage of capital and that luck which is perhaps only rare business tact, had built up quite a home for himself in the great Southwest and was the proprietor of a flourishing ranch. He surprised her, one day, by coming back—so tall, broad-shouldered, and tawny-bearded, that she felt herself related to a genuine son of Anak, and introduced him as such to all the coterie of her friends. Perhaps she made too much of the handsome rascal; for Tom had retaliated by carrying on a desperate flirtation with her

most intimate friend, and, after a protracted visit, had gone back, taking the lady with him as Mrs. Brevoort. By this event, Grace had found herself desolate indeed, and thus it was that her brother's proposal to visit them was hailed with delight.

It happened that matters so shaped themselves as to render the project feasible. Some friends of the Brevoorts' were going by steamer to Galveston, and her brother had written her that he would meet her in that city if she could arrange for the rest of her trip. In this way, the difficulties which accompany so lengthy a journey were readily overcome. Fate seemed propitious, and Miss Brevoort felt that the star of her good-fortune shone ever before the prow of the vessel that bore her to Southern seas.

It is not strictly a part of this history to accompany her on that delightful voyage—to record how blue waters bounded ever beneath the good ship's flying keel, while sunny skies leaned over from above, and all the air grew odorous with spice and balm. To the fair voyager, it was a constant panorama of beauty and novelty. And, when she reached Galveston and found that fair Southern city lying by the summer sea basking in tropical warmth, girt with flaming oleanders, and swooning in an atmosphere of fragrance and bloom, her admiration knew no bounds. And here she found Tom to welcome her. So that, in a few days, she was whirled away northward, over broad prairies and savannahs that seemed to stretch away interminably into the dim horizon through a landscape overhung with sombre creeping moss, where droves of cattle wandered apparently without hindrance or restraint, until at last the distant frontier station of Ballinger was reached. Thence a long ride over hills and valleys dotted with live-oak and bordered with mesquite brought them to the waters of the Big Horn and the broad and fertile acres of Thomas Brevoort.

Miss Grace had been here now for several

weeks and had grown familiar with the ways and manners of her new life. It seemed to her that she had never known surroundings so enchanting. If there was one thing that pleased her more than another, it was the entire freedom from conventional form and restraint. The boundless ocean of air and space about her brought with it a feeling of rest and peace; and, in the renewed sense of health and vigor which she enjoyed, she began to wonder how she had ever endured the tyranny of brick and pave. Besides, she was with those she knew and loved best. Edith Somers, Tom's wife, was to her a crown of comfort and the soul of joy. Similar in taste and temperament, they had been all in all to one another, and, whether riding together over the flower-starred prairie or chatting on the broad sunny verandah, which commanded a vast and beautiful prospect, the hours went lightly on congenial wings.

It will be understood that the scene which Miss Brevoort contemplated was very different from that which had greeted her brother. She was reaping the golden results of patient endeavor. All the hardships that had confronted him—the dreary hand-to-hand fight with nature and bodily want—she could not know. Nor, with the roof of the comfortable ranch-house above her head and the luxuries of its cultivated garden before her, could she appreciate the weary months of tent-life and the scanty bill-of-fare that had preceded these. All these details were fresh in the memory of her brother Tom, and had a material effect on his enthusiasm. But, in the society of his sister, who accompanied him everywhere and entered so heartily into his plans and projects, his labors found an additional zest. He was proud, too, of the admiration she excited. Grace had always been an intrepid horsewoman, and there were few finer sights than this blonde and graceful young woman putting to his paces a certain fleet black pony with which Tom had presented her. Ever since her arrival, she had been the recipient of a sort of idolatry remarkable in a country of chivalrous men. Hops and barbecues had been given in her honor, and her presence had been the crowning glory of many a round-up. All these demonstrations Grace had accepted becomingly but with outward imperturbability. It was a matter of wonder to Thomas

Brevoort to find that they produced upon his sister so little impression; he had been down in the South so long, that his impulses and appreciations were Southern.

"Perhaps it's the Northern 'repose' we hear so much about," he said to his wife, in one of their confidential tête-à-têtes.

It was indeed nothing of the sort, and, well as Thomas Brevoort knew his sister Grace, there was one episode in her life of which he had always remained in ignorance: He had never known Jack Harrison, nor how much Grace had grown to think of him. He had never known how, amid all the whirl of that giddy social life that had grown so distasteful to her, there had been one face that stood out from the crowd, one heart which had touched in hers a responsive chord. It had all taken place after he had gone away. There had been a few weeks of delightful society, a few hours that lingered still in the young girl's memory with all the fragrance of June roses, and then a cruel misunderstanding, a few harsh words, and all was over. Jack had gone away, too, into the Southwest, yielding to the despotism of a foolish pride. Whither he had wandered or how time had gone with him, she had never heard: she only realized how colorless and weary had grown the world he left behind; how society seemed a soulless monotone; and how she saw in all gayety the skeleton at the feast. Perhaps this was not the least of the many reasons that made her present existence so delightful to her. And she hung around the shrine of her shattered memories the bind-weed of regret.

II.

THERE was certainly very little trace of this in the serene-faced young woman who reclined in a manilla hammock, in a corner of the broad verandah, one pleasant morning in April. It was the height of the vernal season; the broad undulating valley stretched away endlessly before her, steeped in the shimmering sunlight, dotted with live-stock, and forming a gratifying panorama of life and color; the air was full of freshly-blown odors and the chorus of birds; mocking-birds, overflowing with melody, frolicked and wantoned with the breezes; and all the attributes of earth seemed the incarnation of joy.

Miss Grace Brevoort thought so too, and shaded her eyes against the glittering landscape, as she drank in its beauties. She was all alone that morning. Tom and Edith had gone over to Ballinger on business, and, from an impulse that was new to her, Grace had remained behind. She felt meditative and thoughtful, and wanted the opportunity to get by herself and indulge in a retrospective mood. It was a question, perhaps, whether, with the awakening season, the fair Northerner had not been lately given a good deal to day-dreaming and reverie. Back in the city, she had had no opportunity, for the whirl of fashionable gayety had kept her ever on the wing. But here was that delightful leisure and repose, where, amid fascinating surroundings, one loves to linger over the bright visions and memories of the past, and all the vanished pleasures of a life start into being, as at the wand of a magician.

Miss Brevoort was swinging listlessly to and fro, her thoughts busy with a certain episode of the days gone by, when, attracted by something occurring on the broad expanse of prairie before her, she sprang suddenly to her feet, and, running to the balustrade of the verandah, leaned against a vine-clad pillar of the porch. I have forgotten whether I have described her, and certainly one who had marked the slight and graceful figure reclining in the hammock would have been hardly prepared for the erect and animated beauty of the blonde apparition so suddenly revealed. This girl had the gait of a goddess, and, as she swept across the verandah, it was a pleasure to the eye to witness the lithe ease of her every movement. Her hair was as blonde as amber, and waved about her temples in the soft breeze that was playing over the valley, while in her eyes was something of the golden haze which seemed to rest upon the landscape she beheld. She had that clear complexion which is only the accompaniment of perfect health, and, when she smiled, it was with a flashing revelation of brilliant teeth that was extremely fascinating.

She was dressed, this morning, in a stylish long black gown which she sometimes wore for a riding-habit, which fitted her so exquisitely that you caught the superb contour of her figure in all its graceful symmetry. Small wonder, indeed, that the advent of this beautiful and accomplished young woman

had caused such a sensation among the eligible bachelors of the frontier, and that they had vied with one another in their efforts to entertain her and to make her stay in the Southwest memorable. Nor was this chivalrous attention confined only to the single men. It is said that "Belton Joe," driver of the daily stage between Belton and Lampasas, and a married man, came all the way by cars from his neighborhood, to get a glimpse of the lady's loveliness, and was fain to remark that she was superior to anything that had ever required his professional attentions.

"They's a gal up thar in Big Horn," he was wont to say, "thet kin git away, in looks, with anything thet was ever raised in the Southwest. She's ez airy and graceful ez an antelope fawn, with hair ez yellow ez corn-silk, and eyes thet sparkle like a glass o' sherry in the sunlight."

Something was transpiring, just now, on the grassy level in front of the Big Horn Ranch, in which these beautiful eyes were evidently much interested. A horseman had suddenly emerged from the belt of timber that bordered a low divide on the left of the landscape, and was coming across the plain at a headlong gallop. He was mounted upon a chestnut horse that showed evident signs of weariness. The rider, who was without hat or coat, but who rode magnificently, glanced constantly backward over his shoulder in the direction of the locality he had just quitted. Hardly a second elapsed when a second horseman burst from the neighboring cover and came thundering across the valley, in hot pursuit of the fugitive. As he rode, he swung about his head a flying lariat, and, in the first few bounds that his gray horse took on emerging from concealment, it was apparent that he was the better mounted. This was evidently perceived by the horseman in advance; for he immediately turned in his stirrups and emptied his revolver at his pursuer, as he rode, sending shot after shot behind him with a rapidity that startled the morning stillness and sent ringing echoes down the valley.

The unexpected reports brought Grace to her feet with an excitement that blanched her cheeks and flashed from her eyes. This was the first instance she had seen of hostility upon the frontier, and it had in it a novelty that was at once dangerous and fascinating. The two horses were coming on at full gallop,

their rapid evolutions in full view of the startled girl. The man riding the gray had ceased to swing his lariat and was clinging close to the neck of his horse, to avoid, if possible, the marksmanship of his enemy. At each shot from the revolver, Grace could see the charge flash from the muzzle and the smoke gather along the plain.

Suddenly the shots of the revolver were answered by a volley of rifles down the valley, and, turning, Miss Brevoort beheld a mounted squad of men scattered across the plain directly in the path of the fugitive and apparently waiting to intercept him. At the sound, the rider of the chestnut horse threw away his empty pistol, and, wheeling about, laid his whip about its flanks, coming back upon an angle of his former course. He rose in the stirrups, and, urging his jaded animal to the utmost, attempted to escape by a burst of speed up the valley. His pursuer turned also, and, once more erect in the saddle, came after him furiously, coiling his lariat as he ran—his gallant gray a thunderbolt of action against the green horizon-line.

It was indeed a beautiful sight, this mad race for life between these mounted combatants, and Grace Brevoort gazed upon it breathlessly, despite the ringing cheer that burst from the mounted cavalcade and the thunder of flying hoofs that were now apparently joining in the pursuit. The gap between the rival horsemen was rapidly closing up. The gray horse was gaining upon the chestnut with every spring. From where she stood, Grace thought she could almost see the despair and nervousness of the fugitive, as he realized his desperate case. And now the sinuous lariat was swinging again about the head of the pursuer, its coils enlarging at every swing. On a sudden, the flying noose left the hand of the rider, and, shooting ahead in a long spiral, descended full about the shoulders of the fugitive. Instantly the gray horse checked his speed and braced his forefeet for the coming recoil. There was a sharp shock, and, with a sudden tightening of the rope, the captured man was plucked violently from his saddle and rolled heavily upon the plain.

The whole scene passed so quickly that it was over before Grace had recovered from her surprise, or indeed had shifted her position. Not until the capture was effected, however, did a sound escape from the combat-

ants. The chase had been too desperate to admit of call or cry. With the fall of his adversary, the successful horseman reined up his gray, and, waving his broad sombrero about his head, indulged in a shout of triumph that would have done justice to a view halloo. It was answered by a chorus of cheers from the others in pursuit, and soon there was a cluster of horsemen about the fallen man and a hurried consultation. Meanwhile, the captor had dismounted from his horse and loosened the confining lariat. The prisoner had been thrown with great violence, and appeared, at first, too much injured to rise. The mounted cavalcade appeared to entertain little sympathy for his condition. From where she was standing, Grace could hear their excited voices in conversation, and it seemed to her that the majority were in favor of doing him still greater violence. At last, the counsel of the horseman who had taken him prisoner seemed to prevail, and she beheld him hand over the captive to the leader of the party, and, mounting his horse, ride away over the prairie in the direction from whence he came. The others were not long in following his example. The arms of the prisoner were securely bound behind him, and he was lifted to his feet and placed again in the saddle. A rope was tied about the neck of his horse, one end of which was given to one of the mounted escort. The rest sprang to their stirrups and were soon in motion, coming in the direction of the ranch-house.

III.

THE trail-road across the plains to Balingier ran by the Big Horn Ranch, and it was along this highway, barely discernible by several faint wagon-tracks, that the cavalcade was approaching. Living thus on a line of communication upon the frontier, it was quite customary for travelers to stop, by twos and threes, in that hospitable fashion which obtains throughout the South; but, for the visit of a score of armed men, Miss Brevoort was hardly prepared. Accordingly, she beat a hasty retreat into the house and sought the security of her bed-room. Knowing the peculiarities of the region, she feared that it might enter into the mind of the majority to stop to dinner, and the thought of entertaining so many warlike strangers at table was more than

she could contemplate with composure—if, indeed, there was sufficient provision in the larder for such a host. Her trepidation, however, did not prevent her reconnoitering from the vantage of her bed-room window. Hidden from view by the carefully drawn curtains, she beheld the armed band approach and draw rein at the rancho-gate. They appeared to be a sheriff's posse—and, to her Northern eyes, they seemed indeed a motley crew. Dusty and travel-stained, with no distinguishing uniform, their horses jaded and flecked with the foam of hard riding, it was difficult to realize in them a brave and disciplined troop. But, recruited as they were from among the best shots and riders in the State and accustomed to the perils of border warfare, Miss Brevoort knew the record of these regulators of the frontier. Pinioned upon his horse, hatless and coatless, in the centre of the group of horsemen, their captive was readily discernible. He appeared to be a black-browed evil-faced ruffian, who regarded his present predicament with sullen discomfiture. This did not prevent him, however, from sharing in the refreshment of his captors, who had no sooner halted than they began to recruit their flagging energies from certain tin canteens that were passed from hand to hand. After a long draught from one of these, the ranger who held his confining tether, good-naturedly extended his flask to the lips of the prisoner. The latter drank greedily.

"Geewhittaker! Train-wreckin' hain't interfered none with this feller's capacity!" said the ranger, holding up ruefully the empty flask. "Sheriff, toss me over yours. I'm as dry as a potato-bug."

The sheriff, a small man with a nervous manner, who had already dismounted from his horse, did as he was requested and then called out to his followers, in so loud a tone that every word came distinctly to Miss Brevoort:

"I reckon we better tie up here, boys, and wait till the sun gets down a little. Tom Brevoort will give us a bite, and it'll rest the horses. And, mind ye, no skylarkin', for I hear tell they's a young woman from the North at this ranch."

Grace waited to hear no more. Dropping the window-curtain, she ran through the hallway, down a back staircase, and thence, by the door of the neighboring kitchen,

escaped to the barn at the rear of the house. To be held up as a criterion to the gaze of a score of rude and savage men was more than she contemplated. She preferred that they should find the ranch untenanted, and infer that everyone had gone away. For awhile, she busied herself in feeding Gipsy, her black pony, and in gazing through the barn-window at the sun-steeped landscape without and the ever-circling buzzards; then, as the time dragged with her, she began to long for a gallop over the prairie levels. She peered from the barn-door, to see if the mounted party had gone: she could not tell, for the barn lay directly in the rear of the ranch, and that structure impeded the view. Through the barn-gate, she could make her exit unnoticed. What was there to prevent her riding away and escaping this unpleasant interruption altogether?

She answered the question by going at once to Gipsy's stall and saddling and bridling that intelligent animal. It was no trick at all for the fair Grace to do this, for she had been used to it before she assumed long dresses. To mount successfully was a more difficult matter; but, catching up a light sombrero belonging to her brother, she succeeded at last, with the aid of a broken chair, in climbing into the saddle, and, with a sigh of relief, she gave the rein to her black pony and dashed away. In a few moments, she was far out upon the plain.

It was a glorious day, and it seemed to Miss Brevoort that the excursion was in every way as agreeable to her horse as herself, as she went cantering away over the grassy levels, scaring the turtle-doves from their nests amid the dwarf mesquites and frightening many a sleepy jack-rabbit from his form, while the prairie-dogs kept up a shrill insistent clamor from their mounds. Miss Brevoort had learned to appreciate the danger of this pigmy enemy, and was as adroit as Gipsy in avoiding their many burrows. She had ridden long and far, and was beginning to think of returning, when she was suddenly aware that she was almost side-by-side with an antelope that was bowling along at an easy amble among the scanty timber.

The surprise gave Grace quite a perceptible thrill. Although not unfamiliar with

these graceful creatures, she had never before been so near to one. She was so close now that she could readily distinguish its rough piebald coat, almost like fine quills in texture, the singular curvature of its horns, and the beautiful eyes of the animal. From a desire to test its powers of speed, she shook the reins over Gipsy's neck and encouraged him to exert himself. The impetuous little pony was off at once, like a bolt from a cross-bow.

Away they flew, in a burst of speed, over the grassy plain. For a few moments, it seemed to Miss Brevoort that the graceful creature she was pursuing was not so fleet as her horse. She was, at times, so near to it that she believed she could have reached from the saddle and touched it with her riding-whip, and she could hear the quick hurried breath of the frightened animal. As they rode along, neck and neck, she began to fancy that the antelope was wounded, and, in the excitement of the chase, she almost wished for a revolver, that she might try her prowess with the weapon. But she had miscalculated the endurance of her quarry, as she soon discovered. It was merely trying, with the perverseness it sometimes exhibits, to cross her course. This it finally succeeded in doing, her horse almost running it down as the fleet and graceful apparition glided by. Hardly had Miss Brevoort wheeled her horse, when it was fifty yards in advance, and it increased its lead at every spring, bounding away with a velocity it was idle to follow. It soon disappeared in a fringe of timber far down the valley.

Grace realized how well merited were the stories she had heard of the fleetness of the antelope, and checked the rein on her laboring pony. He was completely "blown." She wondered how far she had galloped, and cast her eyes over her shoulder in the direction of the distant ranch-house. To her surprise, it was nowhere to be seen. Turn as she would, she could see no trace of it. As far as the eye could reach, the appearance of the valley was the same. Clumps of mesquite and live-oak stretched before her in tiresome monotony. The undulating billows of prairie rolled away against the dim green horizon—a hopeless uncharted sea. It came over her suddenly, unanswerably, that she was lost upon that wide expanse of prairie.

IV.

Lost upon the prairie! To one acquainted with the great plains of the Southwest, it would be difficult to exaggerate the terrible calamity that had overtaken Miss Brevoort. But perhaps, among civilized men and women, no misfortune is so little understood. There are doubtless those who imagine that, to a mounted man, the situation presents few difficulties. This is a fearful mistake. It requires all the skill and experience of a long life upon the plains, and the names of those who have perished in the attempt to escape are legion. To begin with, it is not possible to ride across the open prairie, anywhere, in a straight line, for a distance of ten miles. The chances are, that the rider will simply describe a circle. After riding for half a day, he will be disheartened by coming back to the point at which he started. And, to the bewilderment and despair consequent upon such discouragement, accompanied by the twin enemies, hunger and thirst, the wanderer readily succumbs.

Fancy, then, the plight of our heroine, destitute of any knowledge of woodcraft by which her situation might be alleviated. She had never learned it was possible to take one's bearings by means of that shifting guide, the sun; she could not tell the northward side of trees and rocks by those weather-signs that are known to the ranchman; above all, she did not know that, in throwing the reins over the neck of her horse and in trusting to his dumb sagacity, there was a more probable chance of success than any experiments of her own might attain. Perhaps her very ignorance of her desperate situation sustained her most. She remembered afterward that, when it first dawned upon her that she was lost, she did not grow sick or faint with terror. Her senses did not reel, nor did hope die out in her breast. She closed her eyes for a moment, and prayed silently for deliverance in her terrible case. Then, shaking the reins over Gipsy's neck, she rode back in the direction she believed she had come, scanning the horizon at every step, confidently expecting each minute to be rewarded by a sight of the distant ranch.

Vain hope! Fatal delusion! The sun was beginning to decline and found her still riding—searching the vague horizon with staring vision. With the surmounting

of each successive prairie billow, the next rise beyond—vast, measureless, monotonous. The very silence of the uncultivated waste began to oppress and terrify her. She began to be bewildered and to be haunted by a fear that, with each step, she was going further and further out of her course. She grew hungry, and, as the discomfort of this grew upon her, the thought of starvation and her utter helplessness made her almost delirious. But, faint with terror and exhaustion, she struggled on.

It was almost sunset, when, as she mounted a high divide, her horse surprised her by suddenly neighing loudly and making a *détour* to the right. The heart of the wayfarer gave a great bound of joy: they were traveling directly in the path of the sun's rays, and its dying glories steeped her person in rosy warmth. Shading her eyes, she endeavored to discern what had excited her horse. The sound of a distant stock-bell met her ear, and, to her delight, she perceived a small adobe house built amid a clump of live-oaks on a little rise of ground. Several horses, closely hobbled, were grazing near-by.

With a prayer of thankfulness for what she deemed her deliverance, Miss Brevoort rode hurriedly forward. As she drew near, her arrival elicited no sign of welcome. The horses, indeed, raised their heads and greeted her with a slight whinny; but no answer of recognition came from the house. Somewhat surprised at this, she dismounted, tethered her horse by the long rope that hung from her saddle-bow, and turned toward the dwelling. It was as silent as the grave. The rancho-door stood wide open, and a lean dissipated-looking black cat raised itself from the floor where it had been lying, and, stretching itself, came forth to greet her, mewing violently and regarding her with staring yellow eyes. After hesitating a moment, Miss Brevoort stepped within. It was a small apartment, and was evidently the daily habitation of some ranchman. A small cot-bed stood in one corner, and over it, suspended from the wall, hung a pair of antlers, from which depended several coats and other articles of clothing. There was a small rack of books above a toilet-stand. Upon a chair was a brier-wood pipe still full of ashes, where its owner had carelessly laid it down. In a corner were several rifles, guns, and whips.

Miss Brevoort took in these details of the absent occupant's housekeeping in a single sweeping glance. Her eyes wandered away to a closed door at the further end of the room. Stepping across the apartment, she knocked upon it. No reply. She lifted the latch and peered within.

A table covered with the remains of what seemed the morning's breakfast met her eye. The coffee-pot still rested upon the stove, and in a cupboard near-by she could see several loaves of bread. Frontier hospitality is of too unceremonious a character to regard appearances: it is an unwritten law that the traveler shall stop and refresh himself at any dwelling along his route. But, had the circumstances been different, it is doubtful if Grace could have withstood the temptation to dine. She had ridden since early morning, and during that interval had not tasted a mouthful of food. She was almost famished, and she at once sat down and satisfied the cravings of her appetite. If the fare was cold, she certainly found it palatable, and the black coffee did much to recruit her strength after the fatigue of her journey. Having supped, she repaired to the adjoining room and confronted her singular situation. She was in hourly expectation of the proprietor's return. She reflected with natural perplexity upon the explanation she must give of her position and the manner in which this explanation would be received.

Her loneliness was enough to provoke a shudder, and yet she did not know how soon the presence of humanity might place her in greater danger. It would seem, however, that her fears were groundless; the hours went slowly by, but she was unmolested. Midnight found her in undisputed possession of the ranch. Once or twice in the interval, she had thought she heard the sound of voices, and, boldly throwing open the door, had awaited, with an assumption of courage she did not feel, the expected arrival. At last, worn out with waiting and the fatigue of the day, she lay down upon the little cot and drew about her shoulders an old buffalo-robe that lay upon the foot of the bed. For a time, she lay listening, in the darkness, to the lonely hooting of an owl upon a neighboring divide. This ceased presently, and she fell into a heavy sleep.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]

MR. MIFFLIN'S THEORIES.

BY REBECCA HARDING DAVIS.

PART I.



So often as Mr. Gilbert Mifflin saw fit to disturb the exact routine of his daily life in town in order to visit his mother at the farm-house, the notes of preparation sounded there for days beforehand.

Good easy-going Mrs. Mifflin remembered with a thrill of alarm how dainty were dear Gilbert's apartments at his hotel, how his separate table was laid at the club with his own exquisite silver and china, how inexorable was the order of his office.

"Dear Gilbert!" she used to say to her nephew Bob. "He has what one might call a fastidious soul. Our rough-and-tumble ways jar on him."

Bob nodded assent. Inwardly, he remarked that Gil Mifflin had been an intolerable prig in his cradle, and that, as an old bachelor, he was more than flesh and blood could stand. But Bob had a talent for silence, when his discourse to himself was most emphatic. He sat down on the porch to finish his pipe, while his aunt hurried out to oversee the preparations for dinner. To his mind, nothing could be more charming than this old homestead, with its few fields, which lay sunning itself in the valley. His own farm, the largest in the county, included all the rolling hills and river-bottoms to the north. The gray towers of his house rose like a castle on a height dimly visible among thick forests. Robert Baker's eye fell on it as he sat smoking.

"Many a man," he thought, "would think himself well off, with a magnificent place like that and a substantial bank-account, at twentyfive! But what a great lonely barn it is! I've a mind to sell the whole thing under the hammer and go buy a ranch in Dakota!"

Bob Baker was known as one of the most practical and jolly young farmers in Adams County. His present gloomy mood, doubtless, had something to do with the glimpses which he caught of a chubby young girl

who darted here and there through the house in a fever of preparation. Six months ago, Bob had discovered that his life was not worth living unless Margaret Bascomb shared it. She was a penniless niece of Mrs. Mifflin's on the other side of the house, and part of poor Bob's delight in his love had been that he could take Maggy into so luxurious a home and make the orphan girl whom the fashionable neighbors had unubbed and neglected the great lady of the county. But, just at that point, Gilbert Mifflin proposed to her and was accepted.

He rode over to Sycamore, the next day, and formally announced his engagement to Bob. He was a man who never neglected any social duty.

"Yes," he said, tranquilly, smoothing his fair mustache, "I have no doubt I shall be happy. Miss Bascomb possesses most of the qualities which will make her a pleasant companion for life. She is, first of all, a gentlewoman; and I find her pretty enough. I should not wish my wife to possess beauty that would attract public attention. She is a little too enthusiastic—too much of an ingénue—for a captious taste. But we will soon alter that."

"No doubt!" growled Bob.

"And this alliance," pursued Mr. Mifflin, taking off his glove and glancing critically at his pink nails, "satisfies me on a point which has long disturbed me. Miss Bascomb's mother was disinherited by my grandfather for a whim; my father succeeded to the whole estate: hence her poverty. I feel now that I have made the amende honorable."

"It is most kind in you, I'm sure," said Baker, bitterly.

He resolved, as Gilbert rode away—even his horse paced in measured steps—that he would never see Maggy again. The pain was sharp as death, to him. But he had seen her every day since then, coming to the house as familiarly as he had always done. Nobody guessed his secret, he thought. It did not harm her; and, in his despair,

there was a savage satisfaction in thus torturing himself.

He even joked with her now, as she ran here and there, making ready for Gilbert's coming.

"What is that extraordinary machine?" he asked, as she passed him with her arms full.

"Oh, an alarm-clock of a peculiar kind. Mr. Mifflin is awakened by one every morning, in town. He complained that he missed it here, being roused by the twittering of the birds; so I sent to New York for one."

She danced away, her eyes sparkling. Presently, she came in from the barn, with a basket of new-laid eggs.

"And now what is to be done?" demanded Bob, stabbing himself again.

"Mr. Mifflin always has an omelette au rum, after the roast beef. And we never knew it until the last time he was here! He must have missed it miserably. If we only knew all his little habits! But he never tells us until afterward, and then it is too late. I made a dreadful mistake, the last time!" shaking her head mournfully.

"What was that? Sit down, Maggy, and tell me about it."

"I—I haven't much time. But—"

She sat down beside him, so near that he could see the soft warmth come and go in her cheeks and watch the glint of the sunlight on her reddish hair.

"Why, I filled his room with vases of roses—gathered them with the dew on them! Nothing but roses! Oh, the air was delicious, I thought! And, do you know, he dislikes roses! He dislikes all flowers but odorless ones. Poor fellow—he had the headache; he had to throw them all out, in the night."

"Poor fellow, indeed!"

Bob rose hastily and walked off to the stables. Mrs. Mifflin was standing in the doorway, listening to Margaret's chatter with a thoughtful face.

"Take the eggs in to Sally, Margaret, and tell her to make the omelet."

"Oh, no—I shall do it! It must be done to the very instant! Sally is clumsy. I can come in to dinner afterward."

"I do not choose that you shall be Gilbert's cook. My dear—" She hesitated, putting her hand on Maggy's head and

turning the childish beaming face up to her own. "You love my son very dearly, Margaret?"

"Oh, aunt!" her eyes filled with tears, "do you doubt it?"

"No; I almost wish I did. You—you spoil Gilbert! It would be better that he were not so sure of your affection, perhaps."

"Am I unmaidenly?" starting back and turning pale.

"My child—no! But you are so frank: one can read your every thought as though you were a little child. Well, no matter—it cannot be helped."

"No, no—it cannot be helped!" Maggy flung herself on the elder woman's neck and began to sob. "I love him! And how can I hide it? Why should I hide it?"

"That is all right," said Mrs. Mifflin, soothing her. What was the use? Nobody could give depth or darkness to yonder clear shallow brook.

Robert Baker, trotting homeward down the muddy lane, passed the Jersey stage which conveyed his cousin from the station. If it had been a triumphal car, that blonde handsome young man could not have occupied it with an air of more grace and tranquil authority. Bob, whose heart was full of sour fermenting thoughts just then, was inclined to quarrel even with the raven gloss of his high hat, the immaculate whiteness of his cuffs and handkerchief.

"Even the cinders and dust of the railway are afraid to interfere with him," he growled, as he nodded grinsly and rode on.

Gilbert Mifflin had always been scrupulously courteous to Miss Bascomb; but, to-day, his deference was so extreme that it chilled the girl with a gloomy foreboding.

"He bows and listens to me as if I were a princess," she complained to her aunt.

"He is quite right, my dear."

"I would give all his civilities for one hearty laugh. He does not feel toward me as he did. I am in his way," she said, with the quick instinct of all unreasoning creatures.

"Nonsense, child!"

But Mrs. Mifflin was uneasy. As soon as Maggy had left the room, she said sharply to her son:

"What is wrong, Gilbert? Have you any fault to find with Margaret?"

"You have a headlong way of launching

a subject, that is certainly startling, mother. I came to the farm purposely to discuss a matter of importance with you. But I propose to consider it to-morrow morning, after breakfast. We will defer it until then, if you please."

"No time like the present, for a disagreeable thing," said Mrs. Mifflin, curtly.

"I should prefer to-morrow, at the hour I had chosen, mother—if you will be so kind."

There were times when her son's inexorable method and urbanity were intolerable to Mrs. Mifflin. Nor did his sincerity make them more endurable. "His groove is so narrow, and he is so sure that he is right in it," she thought, as she tossed, sleepless, on her bed that night.

Gilbert, in his programme, had arranged an interview with Margaret, preceding that with his mother. He begged the young girl formally to give him half an hour in the parlor, to "discuss a matter of supreme importance to both." Maggy, nervous, flushed, and smiling, came in and threw herself down upon a heap of cushions.

"Pray take a chair, Miss Bascomb," he said, calmly, but with the pucker of his light brows that showed annoyance. For the rest, he was in an unusually gay humor—made a carefully-elaborated joke about the weather, which Maggy received with delight and treasured as the choicest of wit.

He placed her with great deference upon a chair, and stood before her in a faultlessly-fitting suit of white linen, a blue cravat giving effect to the neatly-trimmed whiskers and hair. There was a premeditation in his air that startled her.

"Miss Bascomb, I hope the communication I have to make will not annoy or grieve you," he began, smiling agreeably, "though I should be sorry if it did not give you some transient regret. I am not a person who calls up tragic emotions to interfere with the business of life. And what deserves to be called the business of life, if not matrimonial alliances? A marriage is a partnership, in financial, social, and even religious affairs. Why, therefore, should we not discuss it as calmly as any other partnership? You follow me?"

"Oh, yes—I think so," gasped Maggy, bewildered and stunned.

"And coincide with me? Ah, I hoped so. Thanks. Then we can go on nicely."

He coughed once or twice, however, and hesitated, looking keenly at the excited face before him.

"When?" he continued, after a moment's pause, his temporary doubt gone, "when we agreed, a few months ago, to form this partnership, we were both convinced that it would be for our mutual benefit. If either of us has found reason since to believe that it would be disadvantageous, the wise course would be to say so, frankly. You agree with me, I am sure."

"Yes. If I—"

"You do not understand? I am not clear in my way of putting it? I mean that it would be folly in us to form this partnership for life, with the certainty that we would both be losers by it. And, having become persuaded of that, we should annul the contract as calmly as if we had bound ourselves to deal in sugar or tobacco together. I may be mistaken—but that seems to me the rational way of dealing with the subject."

Maggy's candor was that of a child; but, back in her brain, there were some qualities of the adult of which her lover knew nothing.

She rose, looking at him steadily with wide dark eyes.

"Speak plainly," she said: "tell me what you mean. I am in your way? You wish to throw me aside?"

He threw up his soft hand in polite protest.

"That is such a rough way of putting it. The partnership—"

"I formed no partnership—I am a beggar! I have neither beauty nor wit nor money—you have them all. I only gave you—love."

"Tut! tut! I beg of you to be calm and reasonable, Miss Bascomb. It seems to me that we are on the verge of a fatal mistake. A quiet discussion—"

When a sudden death occurs in a house, the survivors seldom show much emotion at the time—they simply do not understand what has happened. It requires time for a great loss to penetrate the soul.

Maggy, now that this stroke had fallen on her, bore herself with a coolness which startled even Gilbert.

"No, we will not discuss it," she said,

in a low voice. "Our marriage seems, to you, a mistake—that is enough."

She drew off her ring and held it out to him.

"I beg of you to believe—"

"Not another word!"

She lifted her hand with a certain dignity, which silenced him. He took the ring and hurried to open the door for her, bowing profoundly as she left the room.

"By George!" he said, "she has more in her than I thought! Now for mother!"

He sent a servant to summon her. But she did not come; she was in Margaret's room, with the girl in her arms. No one ever knew what passed between the two women that day.

It was late in the afternoon when Gilbert found his mother seated in her usual place, her work in her hand.

"Mother," he began, irritably, "I thought you knew I wished to consult with you—upon an important matter."

"Yes, I knew it. But there is no consultation necessary between us."

There was a quiet obstinacy in her manner which he had never seen but once before.

"The engagement with Miss Bascomb is broken. I did it. I wish to put you in possession of my reasons."

"No reason can account for your conduct, Gilbert. You are my son; I wish to remember that, and therefore I will not discuss this question with you."

He stood motionless, looking at her; but she stitched on, without raising her eyes.

"I am not going to act dishonorably; I mean to restore to her part at least of the money of which her mother was cheated. I have made over—"

Mrs. Mifflin threw back her head impatiently.

"Oh, money!" she said. "What is that to Margaret?"

"There will be a great deal of solid comfort in it. She shall not be a loser by the dissolution of the partnership. The alliance which I hope to form—"

"I knew there was another woman!" ejaculated his mother, bitterly, under her breath.

"Yes, there is another," he said, smiling: "a woman of high social position and most fastidious taste. She has precisely the qualities which fit her to be my companion for life."

Mrs. Mifflin betrayed no interest even by a quiver of the eyelid.

"You are displeased with me, mother. I shall not pursue the subject," looking at his watch. "I am going to take the five-o'clock train to town. Pray say all that is kind, on my part, to Miss Bascomb. She—and you, too—will soon look at this matter more reasonably, I doubt not. Good-bye, mother."

"Good-bye, Gilbert."

He turned back after he had reached the door.

"By the way, I wish you would speak to your butcher about his mutton before I return. He should hang it two days longer at least. The boiled leg, yesterday—"

Mrs. Mifflin dropped her work and looked at him in amazement. Her eyes slowly filled with tears. "Could I have given birth to such a man?" she said.

Gilbert, as he walked away, shrugged his shoulders. "Can there be anything more tiring," his thoughts ran, "than a woman full of passion and feeling and temper? Thank heaven, I shall be done with all that, with Clara." He thought of Clara's nature as of a pure colorless atmosphere in which his own could always abide in calm serenity.

PART II.

MR. AND MRS. GILBERT MIFFLIN were registered at the most quiet and exclusive of New York hotels. They had been married two days. Mrs. Mifflin sat reading beside the window. The pale spring sunlight fell on the soft folds of her pearl-colored wrapper, on the thin coils of light hair, and on the finely-cut profile bending over her book. Mr. Mifflin, over his newspaper, scanned her critically. Physically and mentally, she satisfied his fastidious taste.

"Her arms are a trifle lean and her teeth are bad—but that can be overlooked."

Yet his glance was an uneasy one. Since their marriage, he had recognized the fact that Mrs. Gilbert Mifflin was in reality a stranger to him. There were glimpses of countless closed doors in her character yet to penetrate. Had he been too hasty? What if she liked strong perfumes—or would not eat her game high? He should have looked into all these matters.

"Gilbert," said a clear high-pitched voice, "I wish to leave this place, this afternoon."

"Why, my dear, we have but just come!"

"I detest hotels. And New York always bored me. We will go to your mother's. You have told me of that charming old homestead."

"To my mother's?"

Now, Mr. Mifflin had not visited the homestead since the day he had parted with Margaret. When he arranged for his next usual monthly visit, he received a letter from his mother, stating that Margaret was ill: "No affection of the heart or nerves, but matter-of-fact pneumonia." His presence, under the circumstances, was, he felt, not desirable.

How much of Maggy's ill-health was due to the lungs or to the heart, he never knew; for Mrs. Mifflin, immediately on the girl's recovery, took her to California, where they remained for a year. They had returned but a few days before his wedding. Formal congratulations had been received from Mrs. Mifflin; but she gave no invitation to the newly-married couple to visit her; hence the scarcely-concealed alarm in his tone as he ejaculated "To my mother's?"

"Certainly," calmly replied the bride. "What could be more natural? I dislike the publicity of hotel life. I shall be pleased, too, to know your mother."

"But she will not expect us."

"I do not propose to surprise her: surprises are always vulgar, like all other excitements. Telegraph her now. We shall start this afternoon and arrive to-morrow morning. That is easily arranged."

She took up her book again.

Gilbert sat down to write the telegram. He was stunned and cowed by this sharp authoritative overturn of his methodical daily routine. He gasped for breath, mentally. Such a thing had never happened to him in his life. But what could he do? He could not squabble with his two-days' bride. He could never squabble with anybody.

Mrs. Mifflin received the telegram at luncheon, that day. She glanced at Margaret's rosy dimpled face opposite. Robert Baker was beside her, carving the chicken and retailing some joke to her; they enjoyed a great many jokes together. Bob had followed his aunt and Margaret to California.

He had been very tender in his care of the girl, who was sorely hurt. But she was young—her wound healed fast. In the little daily adventures and excitements of travel, she had no time to think of her lost lover while the present lover surrounded her with care, with luxury, with amusement, fun, gaiety, all of which were necessities to her. Presently, he too became a necessity.

They had just begun their old home life again, and Bob was summoning his courage to try his fate.

"I will not have my wife regard me 'as a friend,'" he had told his aunt, that day. "I must have her love, and all of it. I will have no graves in her heart."

"I do not believe she ever gives a thought to Gilbert," his mother had said.

"Who is sending you a telegram?" Margaret asked now.

Mrs. Mifflin hesitated but for an instant:

"Gilbert and his wife will be here to-morrow."

"It is a good thing that the house is in such perfect order," said Margaret, carelessly.

Bob's jealous eyes could see no change of color on her cheek. But the shallowest girl, in a crisis like that, could deceive Othello himself. After the luncheon was over and Bob had ridden homeward, Maggy shut herself up for an hour. Then she came timidly up to her aunt.

"That alarm-clock is still here, that—that I— Mr. Mifflin disliked to be wakened by the birds."

"Nonsense! He shall be wakened by a gong," said Mrs. Mifflin, shortly.

Bob did not appear again until the next day, when he rode up in time to see the arrival of the bride. Her thin features were rasped by travel, and her nose was redder than her lips. Gilbert, as he led her up the steps, glanced quickly from her sharp cold face to Margaret's—beaming, sparkling, and blushing—with a queer tug under his waistcoat where his heart used to be when he was a boy.

Mrs. Mifflin had feared that her welcome to her son's wife would be lacking in warmth, and that "the poor young thing might be hurt." But the poor young thing instantly disabused her of any such idea. She was mistress of the occasion, and might easily have been mistaken for the mistress of the house.

"Your chocolate will be ready in a moment, my son," said Mrs. Mifflin, when the first welcomes were said. "It is Gilbert's habit to take a cup of chocolate at noon," she explained to his wife, "and luncheon at two o'clock."

Clara lifted her light eyebrows. "What an infantile appetite, that craves food every two hours! I do hope, Mr. Mifflin, you are not finical and fussy in your habits? Come, come—no chocolate to-day. We will take a stroll instead, through this pretty grove."

She took Bob's arm as she spoke, and the others followed. There was a heavy scowl on Gilbert's brow. Finical and fussy! Was it true?

Bob's eyes had twinkled, and Maggy grew red with suppressed amusement. What did Clara mean? Did she suppose that his tastes would not be consulted in his own house?

Bob was chivalric in his attention to the bride. He could not decide on a subject delicate and pleasant enough to talk to her on. But she promptly decided for herself, asking him the value of land in the valley.

"There's no investment, I find, like real estate," she said. "It is the only way in which you can secure nine per cent. nowadays. My house in town, which we shall occupy, has appreciated nearly double in value during the last year."

My house! Gilbert overheard the words, and a cold perspiration broke on him. Was this the gentle reserved girl whom he had wooed, whose breeding was never at fault? He began to comprehend the price he must pay for marrying an heiress, and he grew sick at heart.

Presently, he was left for a moment alone with his wife.

"Is that soft little ingénue the cousin on whom you wanted to settle an annuity, and who refused it?"

"Who could have told you, Clara?"

"Oh, I heard it from your lawyer—Mr. Sands—before we were married; of course, I had to know something of your affairs. Quixotic on your part—very! Men are not usually anxious to repair injustice in their grandfathers' wills. But, now that I have seen the girl, I can understand it. She looks like a spice rose."

Gilbert watched her eagerly. Was she jealous? She loved him, then? His heart

began to crave love as never before. He understood suddenly what it was that Margaret had given him, which he had thrown away.

"This was the cousin to whom you were engaged?" Clara asked.

"Did you know that too?" There was a queer shake in his voice. "Yes, it was Margaret."

"I supposed so," carelessly, buttoning her glove.

"Does it vex you, Clara?"

She laughed.

"What a child you must think me! As if a man and woman could live to our age, and love for the first time! Why, I was engaged three times before I married you! Those early feelings are mere fevers of youth. At twenty-five, we form reasonable partnerships for life—like ours," placing her delicate hand on his arm.

Gilbert walked through the listening woods without a word. Some hot passionate being within him started into life, and would have struck the lean hand and cursed the cold smiling sharp face at his side. His whole future life opened before him as in an electric vision. His calm face lost color slowly, but he shut his lips more tightly.

"I have made my choice. I will abide by it. No man shall ever hear me complain," was his resolve.

Margaret, strolling homeward beside Robert Baker, laughed whenever Gilbert's name was spoken.

She saw that he was already cowed and mastered, and the sight cured her of any lingering romance about him. No woman can continue to love a man whom another woman has made ridiculous.

The hearty laughter reassured Bob. Upon that hint, he spoke at once, afraid that the least delay might cause him to lose his newly-found courage. Indeed, he often declared afterward that the words spoke themselves; he could not have kept them back if he had tried.

"And I could not try any longer," he always added; "I had come to the end of my endurance. My heart was too much for my will at last, and, once it got the upper hand, it was as irresistible as a cataract."

Sometimes Margaret used merrily to assert that he did not speak a single intelligible

sentence during his entire rhapsody, and that it was only by accident she at length discovered what he meant by his sudden and unexpected outburst.

"Very well," Bob would answer; "just so you admit it was a happy accident, I don't mind how awkward I was."

This rather hypocritical attempt at under-rating himself invariably changed Margaret into his champion, and he never failed to receive the agreeable information that no man ever did or could make love so charmingly and eloquently as he had done during that pleasant walk.

But, in whatever way Bob contrived to tell his story, certain it is that a very happy-looking young pair reached the house considerably in the wake of the others.

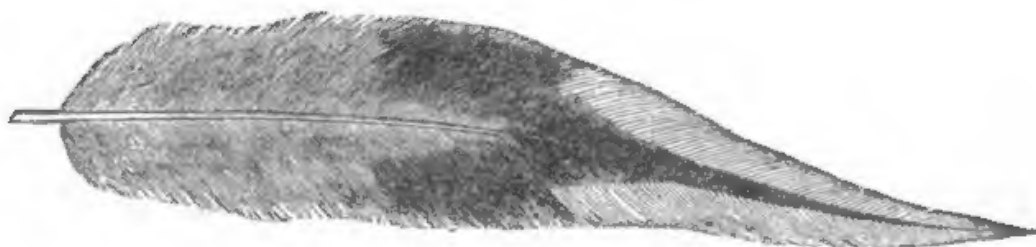
Bob rushed up to his aunt's room, to pour his tale into her ears and receive her heartfelt congratulations. Then she sent him

unceremoniously away and went in search of Margaret, and, forgetful of her that she had ever desired a different destiny for her niece, assured the blushing girl that Bob's news had made her perfectly happy.

Mrs. Mifflin, believing that a clear comprehension of the situation was most prudent in this case, announced the engagement of her niece at dinner that day.

Gilbert wrung Bob's hand without a word, but with more feeling in his face than it had ever expressed before.

"Ah, how charming!" said Clara. "That is your estate to the north, Mr. Baker? And that superb old mansion? I congratulate you with all my heart, Miss Bascomb! You will, no doubt, bring a great deal of romance into your marriage. Mr. Mifflin and I approached ours from the practical side—we remembered percentage and bonds. But we shall all be happy together!"



MARTHA WASHINGTON'S WATCH.

BY MINNA IRVING.

It has a cracked and yellow face
And hangs within a crystal case;
The stem is bent, the key is lost,
The golden back with scratches crossed,
For many a year has passed away
Since last it told the time of day
To Martha Washington.

In old Virginia, years ago,
She put the pretty trinket on,
With rich brocade and laces rare,
And silver-powder on her hair,
When courtly George a-wooing came,
Before she took the stately name
Of Martha Washington.

When he was late, I have no doubt
She took this ancient timepiece out
And frowned to mark him overdue;
For Cupid, tyrant over you

And over me, O love of mine,
Had then the same sweet power divine
O'er Martha Washington.

O broken toy of time! they say
She wore you on her wedding-day.
You saw her beauty and her bliss;
You witnessed, too, the marriage-kiss,
And ticked in answer to the start
And happy throbbing of the heart
Of Martha Washington.

Then, having known a joy so high,
Let both your hands in quiet lie
From sun to sun forevermore,
Like hers by far Potomac's shore,
While all who see you breathe a prayer:
"God send us women good and fair
As Martha Washington!"